

More Declassification? November 6

A *History Today* article regarding secrecy prompted a reader to comment that it conjured up memories of the “Secrecy Commission” chaired by New York Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan in 1995-96. Indeed, there was such a commission, “The Commission on Protecting and Reducing Government Secrecy,” and NSA played an important role in its activities. According to the August article, “by the 1980s, the leadership at NSA and GCHQ had altered their attitudes about releasing documentation on the world war [World War II]. Both organizations moved to increase the declassification of wartime documents. (In the United States, the declassification process accelerated at the end of the Cold War as executive orders from the White House mandated more wide-ranging declassification.)”

The work of the Commission further stimulated thinking and actions regarding more declassification, and Moynihan himself believed America must lead the way to an era of openness. In support of the Commission’s work, NSA provided a senior Classification Advisor Staff Officer from the NSA Office of Policy to work on Moynihan’s staff. A senior staffer from the Policy Office commuted from her Baltimore home to the State Department for 18 months. Her support and efforts were recognized in the Commission’s report, “senior members of the Commission staff brought substantial experience in classification, personnel security and related security matters and a wealth of expertise to their varied staff responsibilities.” NSA also played a lesser known but certainly equally appreciated role in supporting the Commission and staff by providing essential Office IT support (basically word processors at the time) while the staff and Commission worked in some rather dated State Department offices adjacent to the State Department main facility.

Senator Moynihan’s drive for more openness in government was reflected not only in the work of the Commission, but also in his role in promoting the declassification and release of the VENONA reports. .



Senator Moynihan passed a symbolic packet of recently declassified VENONA documents to Dr. David Hatch, the NSA Historian, at the VENONA declassification ceremony at CIA in 1995. The happy individual between them is Vice Admiral J. Michael McConnell, DIRNSA at the time.

The Moynihan Commission had significant influence on the declassification policy of the time and its subsequent changes.

508 CAPTION: A grinning Senator Moynihan is shown passing papers from the left side of a podium (with the CIA logo on it) to a grinning Dr. David Hatch. In the middle, behind the podium is a positively joyous Admiral McConnell, then the DIRNSA.